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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a reading program researched, designed, and developed by Consultants in Total Education for primary students whose mother tongue is other than English. The program includes teaching strategies that trigger universal learning strategies. The program is divided into four general stages, each stage containing particular educational strategies. The first stage is designed for learning to read and contains tasks for linguistic preparation toward reading readiness; it also develops visual and auditory learning ability and fosters motivation. The second stage, learning how to learn to read, is designed to trigger the learning strategies that students must apply to the task of making sense out of the configurations on the printed page. The third stage, learning how to read, develops a set of strategies for applying the results of the preceding stages. The fourth stage, reading for learning, involves the general strategies of empirical cognitive processing. These four stages should be recycled throughout the entire school life of the student. (VM)

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A READING PROGRAM FOR ESL PRIMARY STUDENTS*

Robert D. Wilson

It is the objective of this paper[1] to describe a reading program that is being researched, designed and developed by Consultants in Total Education for primary students whose mother tongue is other than English under the sponsorship of the Navajo Area Office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and of the school systems of Fresno city, Fresno county, and Sanger in California under Title VII. Although the program will differ according to the student population, differ for example in emphasis and in pacing, this program will describe those aspects of the program that make it a program of universal applicability, applicable even to primary students whose mother tongue is English. The reason for this is that a successful reading program includes, almost by definition, teaching strategies that trigger learning strategies that are universal.

This reading program by CITE is part of a total curriculum whose objective is learning how to learn and includes traditional curriculum areas like mathematics and science as well as some new ones like biculturalism and learning how to listen.

I. Stage One

The CITE reading program might be divided into four general stages, namely, learning for reading, learning how to learn to read, learning how to read, and reading for learning. The first stage, learning for reading, includes the following linguistic learning experiences: (1) the development of the student's competence in the second language, directly provided for by approximately 300 lessons in syntax and 150 lessons in phonology, and provided indirectly by the controlled use of the second language in several content areas; (2) sound-spelling correspondences of 150 minimal pairs and triads; (3) several hundred sight words that serve as the pronunciation objective in the content areas of the curriculum; (4) over 200 sight sentences, the phrases of which are systematically color coded according to their grammatical functions; and some sight paragraphs provided in a book entitled Sight and Sound, more paragraphs being provided in the listening strand, a strand which precedes the third stage of the reading program. Besides this linguistic preparation, other aspects of reading readiness are provided, for example, the visual strand, which teaches the student how to learn with his eyes, and the auditory strand, which teaches the student how to learn with his ears. (Motivation, as part of the affective domain of the curriculum and of the learning-for-reading stage, is effected in several ways, only two of which I mention here: directly through consistent success in achieving the objectives of the lessons and knowing that success has been achieved, and indirectly through a bicultural disposition.)

Stage one continues with more second language development, with one sound-spelling correspondences in pronunciation lessons, with more

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sight sentences in syntax lessons, with more sight words and paragraphs in the content areas of the curriculum, even as the reading program moves on to stage two.

2. Stage Two

The second stage, learning how to learn to read, is designed to trigger the learning strategies that the students must apply to the task of making sense out of the configuration of the forms on the printed page. The learning strategies are the following: comprehension, comparison, composition, and quickness. Comprehension is the strategy of habitually assuming that the purpose of reading is communication. For example, it is important for the student to believe that, if he can respond to a written instruction that tells him to sit on a chair by actually sitting on a chair, then he has actually read, although he might not be able to pronounce the sentence "sit on a chair" quite like a native speaker of English. Or for him to believe that if he orally reads the sentence "Mary gave the ball to the teacher" as "Mary gave the teacher the ball" that he has actually read in paraphrasing the sentence because he has provided an utterance with equivalent sense.

The second strategy, comparison, is the strategy of discriminating between a pair (or more) of printed forms by associating with the pair the corresponding oral forms, and expecting to see a structural relationship between the printed forms. It is important for the student to believe that he can trust his senses and, perhaps even more important, that he can trust his teacher to provide him with structured data rather than with random data, otherwise he might come to conclude that the appropriate learning strategy is that of rote memorization, which actually is appropriate for random data. It is perhaps not irrelevant here to suggest that it is important for the student to believe that the teacher will not trick him, that for example, there are no hidden exceptions that he, the student, is responsible for. Exceptions are avoided like the plague in the lessons of this program, but should an exception occur it is important for the child to know that the responsibility for even a temporary confusion is the teacher's, not his.

The third strategy, composition, is a strategy well known to teachers as "learning by doing." It is a process by which the students expect that by putting something together they will learn how that something is put together. (In this strategy, too, the student believes that what he is putting together is not a set of random parts. What would you do with bits and pieces of a car's engine, the left rear wheel, and the windshield wipers?)

The fourth strategy, quickness, means quickness of response. Here the student learns that the quickness with which he responds to the printed stimuli, his response being comprehension, is the criterion he must meet. The value of this strategy as well as the value of the composition strategy is based on the assumption that a decoding task, such as reading or listening, is actually done through simultaneous and anticipatory encoding. In simple terms, this means that as you listen to speech you are actually constructing equivalent messages in your mind and because you must make several hypotheses about what the speaker is saying in order to provide for all the possible things he might say, or at least the most probable, you anticipate what he is going to say next. You see then that the task of decoding in listening or reading is accomplished by simultaneous and anticipatory encoding. The process of composition is a natural strategy, a universal strategy for the students to learn. It should also be clear that decoding by encoding requires many more hypotheses to be generated as the students

perform the act of reading or listening. Thus it is important for students to be able to generate hypotheses as quickly as possible in order to generate as many as possible for any given set of stimuli. Observe, too, that the more hypotheses are generated for any given message, a richer semantic interpretation, that is, a greater comprehension, is brought to bear on the message being read. Still, the generation of as many simultaneous and anticipatory hypotheses as possible for any given message is only one side of the coin. I will return to this when I discuss stage four.

These four strategies on how to learn to read are learned through the design of the CITE lesson plan. Each and every lesson plan of stages two and three has all the four major parts. Their sequence and the essential behavior of each is the following:

a. Comprehension:
   1) Teacher introduces or reviews the meaning or reference of the words or sentences.
   2) Teacher introduces the written forms of the words or sentences.
   3) Students respond to the written forms verbally or behaviorally.

b. Comparison:
   Students select the appropriate written form when the spoken form is given, or select the spoken form when the written form is given.

c. Composition:
   Students show awareness of the structure of the words or sentences by composing the whole words or sentences and by changing one into another by substitution, expansion, deletion, and permutation.

d. Quickness Test:
   Students identify the written forms at a comparatively faster speed.
   1) Teacher shows a written form for a short time.
   2) Students identify the written form by reading it or by answering questions.
   3) Teacher shows the written form again, and students evaluate.

Before I proceed to discuss stage three of the CITE reading program, I would like to discuss a point about linguistic structure which is crucial to the presentation of structured data to the students. The point is that a linguistic unit is established, is learned, and consequently should be taught, by both its composition and its environment, by both what it's made of and where it is, by both what it looks like and by the context in which it is seen. For example, compare the pronunciation of the letter "g" in the pair of words "gape" and "page" or of the letter "a" in "mat" and "mate." The pronunciation of the letter "a" in "mate" is not an exception to the way the letter "a" should be pronounced, as it is in "mat." In the same way that the letter "a" in "mate" is pronounced /ey/ because of the presence of the letter "e" at the end of the word, the letter "a" is pronounced /æ/ in "mat" because of the absence of the letter "e" at the end of the word. Or on another level, a particular word form may have several meanings, which is almost always the case, as any dictionary amply demonstrates. Obviously the form of the wrod is not enough for determining the sense of the word at any given use of the word. The sense of the word is established not only by its form but also by other words in the context in which it occurs.

However, extracting the message from the printed page takes more than merely determining the sense of each and every word. Given the sense of a word, say a proper noun like "John," there is still

meaning that has been left out, as the meaning between the two following sentences demonstrates: "Mary gave the pencil to John" and "John gave the pencil to Mary." Observe that in these the word "John" is not merely a word and a part of speech, but it is part of a phrase that has two different grammatical functions. It is the indirect object in one sentence and the subject in the other. The point is that the basic linguistic unit of a sentence is not the word, but the phrase. And by phrase I mean syntactic function. For example, it has long been a definition in traditional grammar that a pronoun takes the place of a noun. Now "boy" is a noun and the pronoun "he" is accepted as a subject replacement of "boy." However, observe that it is not just "boy" that is replaced in the sentence, "The boy left the room." The pronoun "he" replaces both "boy" and the article "the" in the sentence "He left the room." Indeed this sentence might be a replacement for "The fat boy left the room" or for "The boy who ate all those sandwiches left the room" or for "The fat boy who ate all those sandwiches you prepared for your own dear sons left the room." It is the phrases of the sentence that deliver syntactic meaning like subject of, predicate of, object of, temporal adverb of, negative of, etcetera. Indeed, it is these grammatical functions of the phrases which explain the statement that a sentence is greater than the sum of its parts. The importance of learning phrases as syntactic units, their composition and their environment as part of the reading task, cannot be over-emphasized at this time when most curricular efforts in reading concentrate on sound-spelling correspondences and word meaning recognition.

3. Stage Three

The third stage of the CITE reading program, learning how to read, develops a set of strategies for applying the results of the preceding stages. This set of strategies is characterized by the general ability to concentrate. Concentration is viewed as attention developed to a sophisticated skill. And attention is essentially a figure-ground task, that is, the task of attending to what is in the foreground and ignoring what is in the background, to stick to it in spite of distractions, to hold to one's chosen purpose rather than to other competing and appealing purposes. In reading, the figure of the figure-ground task is to comprehend what one is reading and to comprehend as much as possible in as little time as possible. I hesitate to call this speed reading because of the commercialism associated with that phrase, but speed reading it is and it is an objective worthy of our efforts. The faster reader not only reads more of the materials, he also comprehends more of what he reads -- within certain outside limits on the rate of reading.

What then are the distractions to reading, the background that gets in the way of comprehending as much as possible in as little time as possible? One of them is the antithesis of reading fast, that is, reading slowly. Another is lack of confidence in one's ability to retain information and this is demonstrated by readers who go back to what they have already read. This is known as regression. The third is the habit of vocalizing what one reads so that the reading act is slowed down to the pace of speech rather than speeded up to the pace of visual perception.

What strategies then are needed for reading itself? One is the strategy of concentration on the task of comprehending as much as possible in as little time as possible. Another is confidence in the ability to retain information to the extent that regression does not take place. And a third is to habitually assimilate the configuration on the printed page visually rather than through vocalization.

4. Stage Four

The fourth stage of the CITE reading program, reading for learning

involves the general strategies of empirical processing and cognitive processing. In this particular part of the curriculum, empirical processing involves both the selection of questions about the materials to be read with just a minimum of clues and the answering of those selected questions after the material has been read. Observe that the emphasis here is on selecting a set of questions that narrows down the sort of information expected to be extracted from the reading materials. This is the other side of the coin of the strategy learned in stage two (and in stage three) of the reading program in which the students were encouraged to generate as many hypotheses, that is, as many questions as possible, about the reading material. A smaller set of anticipatory questions makes for more efficient processing of the reading material while the larger set of anticipatory questions makes for an open mind.

Cognitive processing is a general strategy for the specific use of empirical processing and the cognitive processes used in the CITE reading program are those proposed in A Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I, The Cognitive Domain. They are knowing, comprehending, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating.

Stage four is not the end of the reading program. These four stages should be recycled throughout the entire school life of students. As the students go through the first cycles of these stages, the emphasis is on the first two stages, learning for reading, and learning how to learn to read. But as they go through more and more cycles the emphasis shifts to the third and fourth stages, learning how to read and reading for learning. I can think of no circumstances that would permit omission of any one of the stages in any cycle during the entire school life of the students.

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